



The President's Daily Brief

29 March 1971

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

In East Pakistan, the army is harshly asserting its control in Dacca but the situation elsewhere is less clear. (Page 1)

The Communists have apparently initiated their anticipated spring offensive in northern South Vietnam. (Page 2)

Laotian Government forces are continuing their efforts to push the Communists from high ground near the royal capital. (Page 3)

On Page 4, we comment on the Soviet draft agreement tabled at Friday's four-power talks on Berlin.

At Annex we present some thoughts about the Soviet party congress which opens tomorrow.

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PAKISTAN

Dacca remains under firm army control, but complete news censorship, the forced evacuation from Dacca of Western newsmen, and a breakdown of communications with the interior have combined to make the situation in the rest of East Pakistan extremely unclear. Conflicting claims continue to be broadcast by the government and secessionist radios, with the government declaring yesterday that peace had been restored throughout East Pakistan except for a few disturbances, and with the clandestine "Free Bangla" radio proclaiming that widespread fighting persists and that the population is rallying behind Mujibur Rahman's leadership.

Mujib's status is still uncertain. Clandestine broadcasts maintain that he has escaped arrest and is at his headquarters in the port of Chittagong. Yesterday, however, a broadcast identified the leader of the newly proclaimed Bangla Desh regime not as Mujib but as a Major Zia Khan, said to head the Bengali "Liberation Army."

Earlier reports have stated that Mujib was taken into custody on the night of 25-26 March

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The vagueness of the broadcasts tends to confirm that Mujib is in government hands.

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Reports from Dacca indicate that, although the city is relatively quiet, many sections have been destroyed and throngs of refugees have been leaving for the countryside. There is some evidence that the army is attempting to round up all leaders from the Awami League, including recently elected members of the provincial and national assemblies, as well as university students and faculty members.

If, as rumored, a program of eliminating opponents of the regime is indeed under way, the effect will be to destroy the relatively moderate leadership that has characterized the Awami League. This would place future direction of Bengali efforts toward independence in the hands of more extremist political parties such as the currently small Communist organization in East Pakistan. This organization is closely patterned after the Naxalites who have been causing considerable havoc in the neighboring Indian state of West Bengal.



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SOUTH VIETNAM

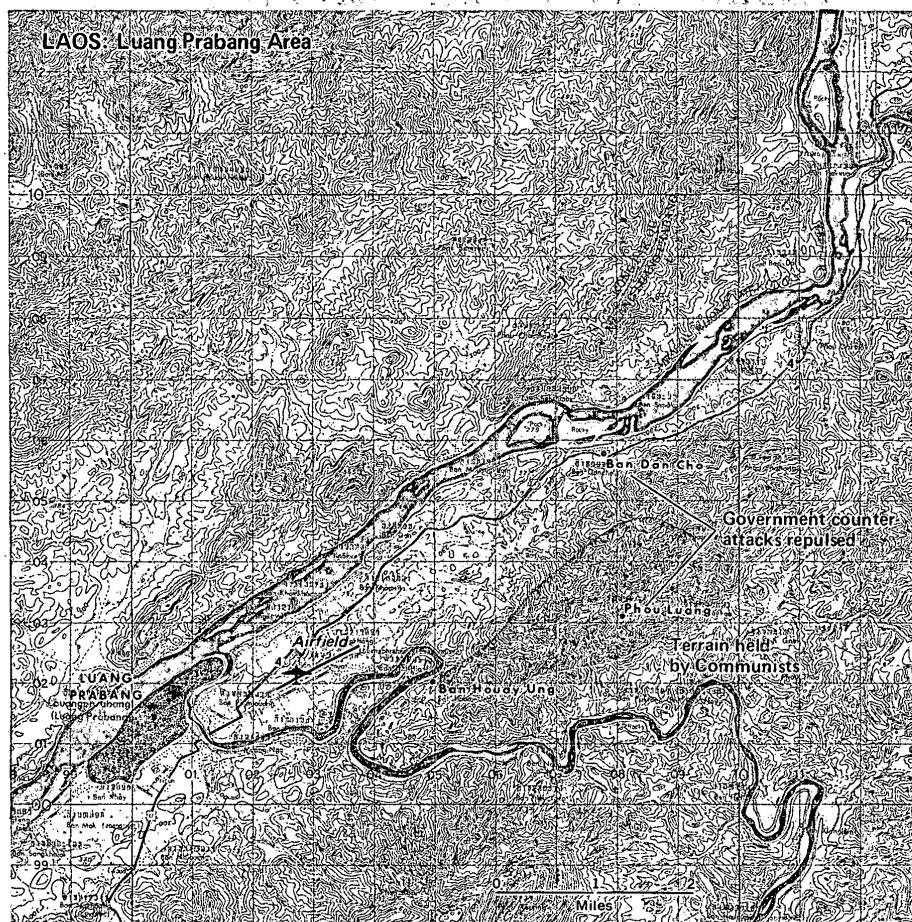
In the northern province of Quang Tin yesterday, a Communist force heavily shelled and temporarily overran a US fire support base, inflicting unusually heavy casualties. Early today, Da Nang airfield was struck by several rounds of 122-mm. rocket fire, resulting in light to moderate damage. Communist forces also launched a series of attacks against several South Vietnamese military outposts and a refugee center in Quang Ngai Province on 26 March.

These actions apparently mark the start of the anticipated Communist spring campaign in the northern provinces of South Vietnam. Recent intercepts show that Communist units in Quang Nam Province were ordered to begin a new phase of military action on 28-29 March. It is likely that Communist plans call for further attacks around Da Nang and elsewhere in the northern half of the country, including the central highlands.

In the Khe Sanh region, there were several Communist shellings and ambushes over the weekend, but none caused serious allied casualties.

The recent movement of the headquarters of the North Vietnamese 308th Division to a point some 11 miles northwest of Khe Sanh could presage more extensive ground attacks. The headquarters is now in an area where Communist antiaircraft gunners have been active in recent days and from which the Communists have staged attacks against Khe Sanh in the past.

To mount a concerted drive in western Quang Tri Province, the Communists would have to reinforce the 308th Division. It sustained heavy casualties during the South Vietnamese thrust into Laos, and intercepts indicate that some of its subordinate units are still having morale and manpower problems. There are at least five infantry regiments and another division headquarters--the North Vietnamese 324B--southwest of Khe Sanh that could be moved in to apply additional pressure on the base.



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LAOS

Government forces defending Luang Prabang have made several attempts to contest Communist control of high ground some four miles east of the town. On the afternoon of 28 March, after two days of heavy fighting, irregular units regained an artillery position at the village of Ban Dan Cho, but their advance farther north along Route 4 has so far been blocked by sustained enemy mortar fire. An effort to retake Phou Luang, a terrain highpoint seized by the Communists on 25 March, was broken up by heavy enemy resistance and by misdirected artillery fire that fell among the government troops.

The threat of enemy artillery fire from this high ground has curtailed the use of Luang Prabang airport, which lies between the heights and the royal capital. Moreover, morale among military leaders in Luang Prabang appears to be low.

Army chief of staff General Ouan expressed doubt late last week that government troops, despite reinforcement from the other military regions, could redress recent Communist gains in the Luang Prabang area. [redacted] the King, believing that the North Vietnamese intend a siege of Luang Prabang, is concerned about arranging air-drops of food and supplies. He remains determined to stay in the capital.

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It is doubtful that the Communists have any intention of entirely isolating Luang Prabang, much less entering the town. They may hope, however, to strengthen their grip on the territory surrounding the airfield to prevent its further use as a military base.

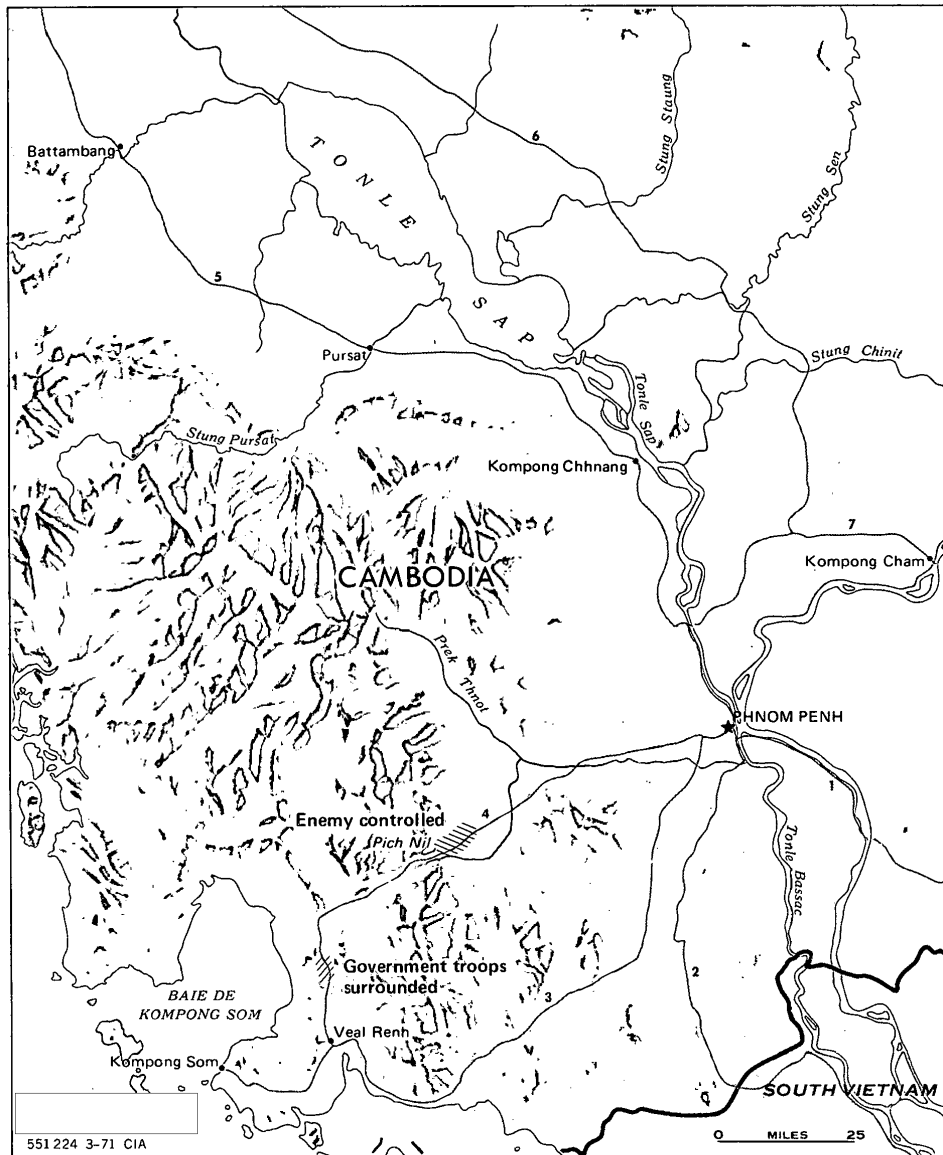
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USSR-BERLIN

The Soviet draft agreement on Berlin, tabled at the four-power ambassadorial session on Friday, demonstrates Moscow's determination to drive the hardest possible bargain. Although it is relatively close in form to the Western draft of 5 February, it falls far short of Western desires on the issues of civilian access, freedom of inner city movement, and the federal German right to represent West Berlin abroad.

The Soviet draft concentrates on pushing the cause of East German sovereignty, while reducing the rights and prerogatives of the three Allied powers regarding access and inner city movement by a proposal that would indirectly delegate political responsibility to the respective German parties. The draft also calls for a drastic reduction in federal German activities and a significant expansion of the Soviet presence in West Berlin.



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NOTES

Cambodia: A Cambodian Army armor and infantry force that attempted to move west over Route 4 toward the Pich Nil Pass this weekend was pushed back by heavy enemy mortar and ground fire, leaving the Communists astride a ten-mile section of the roadway. Initial reports suggest that government casualties and material losses were heavy. In addition, enemy forces have renewed attacks on government troops at the northern end of the pass and are reported to have surrounded other troops farther south on Route 4 near Veal Renh.

Jordan: The northern city of Irbid is now generally quiet and under curfew, [redacted] occasional exchanges of fire were continuing yesterday. The army has seized on Friday's fighting as an excuse to conduct a house-to-house search for arms stockpiled by the fedayeen. In Amman, firing also broke out at several points yesterday, apparently touched off by a student march in support of the fedayeen in Irbid. The government has previously indicated that it would crack down strongly on any incidents in Amman, where security forces have been seeking an opportunity to pick up illegal arms.

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USSR

The 24th Soviet party congress will open tomorrow and last about ten days. On the whole, we believe that internal conflicts will be subordinated to the interests of party unity and stability and that we will see no major policy departures.

Much of the fare will be pretty standard. Party chief Brezhnev will deliver a report on the politburo's activity since the last congress in 1966, including its assessment of the Soviet Union's foreign and domestic affairs. On the foreign front, the US will be raked over the coals for its Indochina and Middle East policies. What the Kremlin regards as its own "successes"--the treaty signed with West Germany, the growth of Soviet influence in the Middle East, and the "normalizing" of Sino-Soviet state relations since the low point of 1969--will be trumpeted. We also expect Brezhnev to speak on such "peace and security" proposals as the Conference on European Security. On the domestic side, he will point to "victories" in the economy and may use the theme of the "strengthened loyalty" of the people to the party as an excuse to warn Soviet intellectuals against dissension and Western "subversion."

The new draft Five-Year Plan (1971-1975) will be presented to the congress for approval by Premier Kosygin. The draft directives, already published in mid-February, show that resources will be allocated among defense, investment and consumption along much the same lines as in recent years. The omission of some statistical data normally published, however, suggests efforts to cover up a somewhat pessimistic outlook for economic growth. The omission may also indicate that allocation priorities--always a divisive issue for Soviet leaders--are still being fought over.

The personal struggles that are endemic within the 11-man coalition politburo have intensified with the approach of the party congress and with Brezhnev's bid to increase and consolidate his pre-eminence over the past year. Although he has allies within the ruling group, his efforts have almost certainly raised some hackles among his peers.

Brezhnev has not yet achieved control of the all-important power of personnel appointments. He apparently has been able to remove some opponents from party and government posts, but appointments to key positions are still a matter for decision by the

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politburo as a whole and Brezhnev has not yet been able to ensure selection of his own supporters. We will be watching closely for clues such as whether or not Brezhnev has enough clout to install Andrey Kirilenko, one of his important politburo allies, as the number-two man in the party secretariat. At the last congress ideologist Mikhail Suslov, now an important counterweight to Brezhnev in the politburo, got this protocol ranking, but most of the responsibilities of Brezhnev's second-in-command have since been assumed by Kirilenko. If Kirilenko is now formally appointed to the job, it will signal a considerable rise of Brezhnev's power.

Despite the vicissitudes of age, health, and political fortunes, there has been no change in politburo membership during the five years since the last congress. Even if 72-year old Arvid Pelshe, who serves as a kind of party inspector general, were to retire now, it would confront the other ten members with a problem of finding somebody sufficiently neutral to succeed him. If one of the young members were to depart--such as Aleksandr Shelepin, currently head of the trade unions and a perennial Brezhnev challenger, or Gennady Voronov, head of the Russian republic and an independent-minded "moderate"--it would create a sharp imbalance in the collective leadership and greatly increase tensions. If there are no changes at all in the politburo, it will mean that the delicate balance among the leadership has led to stalemate and immobility.

Stalemate is already evident in the politburo's efforts to cope with its current major concern, how to get better returns from capital investments and labor resources. Not only are top Soviet leaders hampered by political and bureaucratic infighting, but they fear that reforms may weaken the party's monopoly of power. This fear was reinforced by events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, where party control rapidly dissolved under pressures for economic reform. On the other hand, the dangers of not getting the economy moving were also sharply pointed up to Soviet leaders this winter in Poland when worker protests over food shortages and high living costs forced changes in Warsaw's political hierarchy. In a way Soviet leaders see themselves damned if they do and damned if they don't, and their frustration is mirrored in the economic "reorganization" proposals now before the congress--generally anemic compared with measures under discussion in Eastern Europe.

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The way even these weak Soviet ventures into economic experimentation are debated and handled by the congress and the Kremlin will provide clues as to the degree of unity among the leadership and the strength and ranking of individual politburo members. We believe that domestic issues will be far more troublesome than international ones. Despite some occasional disagreements over how to respond to flare-ups in the Middle East and despite a few dim signs of differences over West Germany, Soviet leaders in our view are far more united in foreign than in domestic policy.

The one really sensitive and intractable issue dividing Soviet leaders is that of Stalin's image. Essentially, the dispute is over how far Soviet policy should go in moving back toward Stalin--symbol of the old way of doing things--and away from Khrushchev--symbol of change and innovation. In the past, Soviet liberals cited Stalin's "mistakes" to argue for change; now, conservatives point to Stalin's "successes" to argue against change. Rumors that there will be a major rehabilitation of Stalin's image, however, have not been supported by the preparatory party congresses of the republics, and it currently seems likely that this issue will also be muffled in the national party congress.

We cannot know, of course, what new initiative some party leader may have up his sleeve that may set events at the congress moving in unexpected ways. But it now appears that there will be no significant new policy directions and that changes in the politburo and secretariat will be kept to a minimum, if indeed there are any at all. Brezhnev may end up having greater precedence accorded him in his position as party secretary general, and he seems more likely to gain than lose from such changes the congress may make, but we believe that his powers will continue to be limited by the system of collective leadership.

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